

Government Relations Report

by: Gene Brandi
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Discussions continue with government agencies involved in the effort to improve honey bee health throughout the country by allowing greater access to their lands for apiary sites. Several agencies, including but not limited to BLM, US Forest Service, Department of Defense, US Fish and Wildlife Service, etc., manage millions of acres, some of which is suitable for apiary sites. BLM and the US Forest Service have contracted apiary sites for many years, but it would be helpful to know if there are any additional federally managed land areas where apiary sites do not currently exist that could potentially support bees. Please contact me at gbrandi@sbcglobal.net so that we can use this information in our apiary location discussions with federal officials.

The ABF/AHPA Memorandum of Understanding with USDA-NRCS and FSA should be signed in the very near future as the language has been finalized and agreed upon by all parties. The purpose of

this MOU is to establish a framework of cooperation among FSA, NRCS, ABF and AHPA to maintain and enhance the productivity of honey bees on private and public lands, and to foster a better relationship between the bee industry and these federal agencies which administer programs for the benefit of beekeepers.

Honey producers are still eligible for NAP (Non Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program) payments in 2016, contrary to an announcement in late October when FSA indicated that honey would not be included in the 2016 program. There is one major change for NAP 2016: honey producers who also purchase crop insurance (the API rainfall insurance program underwritten by USDA-Risk Management Agency) can only receive payments from one program or the other, but not both. According to a Risk Management Agency official, the reason for this change is that both programs are intended to pay for lack of honey, even though API uses lack of rainfall as a proxy for honey. Check with your local FSA office for any additional changes to these programs.

The new transportation bill recently passed by both the House and the Senate contains language very beneficial to pollinator habitat along roadways throughout the USA. The bill is headed to conference committee where it is hoped that the pollinator language will remain as written. If this bill is enacted with the pollinator provisions intact, state Departments of Transportation will be key to making progress for pollinators on the rights-of-way landscape. The White House has scheduled a summit focused on pollinator habitat along roadsides in early December.

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